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SUBJECT: GOF CONDEMNS AL-ASKARIYA SHRINE BOMBING

REF: STATE 28802

¶1. (SBU) The GoF issued two statements, February 22 and 23, condemning the Al-Askariya Shrine bombing, and stressing the need for national reconciliation in Iraq (texts in paras 2 and 3). MFA DAS-equivalent for Iraq/Iran/Arabian Gulf Affairs Antoine Sivan told us the GoF statements were intended to express the GoF's firm and immediate condemnation of the February 22 attack in Samarra, while appealing for calm and national unity, and discouraging sectarian reprisals. Sivan demurred when asked whether the GoF would consider assisting in the rebuilding of the Al-Askariya shrine, citing the GOF's secular tradition.

¶2. (U) The following is a text of the statement issued by the MFA February 22, 2006:

France condemns with greatest firmness the attack this morning in Iraq that destroyed the mausoleum of imams in the town of Samarra.

It is necessary to put an end to all actions that sow hatred and violence between communities and particularly those that involve places of worship.

France calls on all Iraqis to come together in order to define their country's future and put in place institutions that guarantee a place for all components of Iraqi society.

¶3. (U) On February 23, 2006, the MFA reemphasized its position with the statement below:

France reiterates in the strongest possible terms its condemnation of the attack against the mausoleum of the two imams in Samarra. Our ambassador in Baghdad informed Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari and Ayatollah Sistani of the profound emotion of the French authorities and people.

France condemns with the same firmness the increase in assassinations and deadly acts that took place yesterday against other religious sites, specifically Sunni, in the region of Baghdad.

It offers the victims' families, the Iraqi authorities and the people its sympathy.

It calls on Iraqis to renounce violence and mobilize to ensure the success of the political transition process. Today, more than ever, it is essential to restore a climate of confidence among Iraqis.

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<http://www.state.gov/p/eur/paris/index.cfm>

Hofmann